

**Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Cooperative Agreement
for the Continued Operation of the
Metal Finishing, Paints and Coatings, and Printed Wiring Board Manufacturing
Compliance Assistance Centers**

I. Summary

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has funded the development and operation of thirteen compliance assistance centers (centers) to help small and medium size businesses and local governments better understand and comply with environmental regulations. EPA seeks a partner for the continued operation and maintenance of the compliance assistance center for Metal Finishing, Paints and Coatings and Printed Wiring Board Manufacturing. These web sites are currently operated as the National Metal Finishing Resource Center (NMFRC), The Paint and Coatings Resource Center (PCRC) and the Printed Wiring Board Resource Center (PWBRC). In addition, EPA seeks a partner to provide outreach and measurement support for all of the EPA sponsored Compliance Assistance Centers (Center). Proposals meeting the criteria discussed below must be delivered to EPA by 5:00 p.m., June 18, 2003.

II. Background

The NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC and cross Center support activities are funded by a cooperative agreement with the National Center for Manufacturing Sciences (NCMS) that expires in December 2003. Under the Grants Competition Policy that went into effect October 1, 2002, EPA now competes any assistance agreement or grant that will provide the recipient more than \$75,000 in a year.

The NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC are intended as a “first-stop shop” that provides environmental technical and regulatory information, environmental management, and pollution prevention information. The center’s environmental compliance information, tools, and services must be easy to read, easy to use, and tailored specifically to the environmental aspects of metal finishers, paint and coating facilities and the printed wiring board manufacturing industry. In addition, the cross-Center support activities must support Center networking, outreach, and measurement activities.

To achieve this goal, the recipient must:

- Create Internet linkages and partnerships with the various metal finishing, paint and coating and the printed wiring board manufacturing industry groups/associations, EPA and other federal regulatory agencies, other relevant organizations, and the compliance assistance provider communities.
- Develop content (including, regulatory and pollution prevention information) that will

address the needs of the compliance assistance center users.

- Market the Centers to their intended audiences through Internet marketing, design enhancements and other Internet integration techniques.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Centers.
- Work with the thirteen Centers to continue to foster communication among the Centers' cooperative agreement recipients and a sharing of tools among the Centers.

EPA helped establish the NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC and the other compliance assistance centers by sponsoring partnerships with industry, academics, stakeholder organizations, environmental groups, and other Agencies. The centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand, sector-specific compliance information, tools, and services. The web-sites, and their associated list serves and "Ask the Expert" features, make it easier for industry to learn about, understand, and comply with the environmental requirements that apply to their operations.

As stated above, the assistance agreement with NCMS expires in December 2003. In accordance with EPA policy encouraging competition for assistance agreements, the Agency now seeks proposals from qualified applicants who can partner with the EPA, and other interested parties and who have the capability both to support the continued operation and maintenance of the NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC and to support the other EPA sponsored Centers.

In general, the centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand sector-specific compliance information. The centers offer a variety of services, including web-sites, e-mail groups, fax-back systems, and telephone assistance, depending on the needs of the sector they are designed for. All the centers help businesses, tribes, local governments, and federal agencies identify specific regulations that apply to their activities, improve compliance with environmental regulations, and learn about pollution prevention approaches that can save money and resources. All Centers can be accessed at www.assistancecenters.net.

EPA reviewed the responses to its April 2003 Request for Initial Proposals, and determined that certain initial proposals meet the eligibility criteria. EPA now seeks, by June 18, 2003 proposals from those eligible applicants for continued operation and maintenance of the NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC. EPA anticipates making approximately \$600,000 available over a five-year period for this purpose. EPA will partially fund each budget period and will consider funding the balance of budget requests contingent upon satisfactory progress as certified by the EPA Project Officer, the availability of funds, and EPA priorities.

III. Authority

EPA will, as its annual appropriation allows, award financial assistance to the successful applicant in the form of a cooperative agreement. As authorized by 31 U.S.C. §6305, EPA will be substantially involved in carrying out this project. Anticipated substantial involvement will include collaboration in carrying out the scope of work, technical assistance, approval of the substantive terms of contracts and subawards made with EPA funds, change of key personnel, and approval of project phases prior to continuation of the project.

The Agreement will be funded on a “multimedia” basis under Section 103 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. §7403, Section 104 of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1254, and Section 8001 of the Solid Waste Disposal Act, 42 U.S.C. §6981. Applicants are encouraged to review these statutes and ensure that all of the activities contained in their proposals are consistent with the scope of EPA’s authority.

Funding for Compliance Assistance Centers is awarded under Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 66.305, Compliance Assistance- Support for Services to the Regulated Community and Other Assistance Providers.

IV. Applicant Eligibility

Only those applicants that have been invited to participate following the Request for Initial Proposals are eligible.

V. Overview of the NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC

The NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC provide information, tools, and services that facilitate environmental compliance, pollution prevention, and environmental management systems. The web-sites also provide regulatory updates, expert answers to environmental questions, a fax-back service, a vendor directory, and links to other services and sources of environmental information. Working with its partners and EPA, the web-sites provide the most up-to-date environmental information to their users. Environmental compliance information is made available in its original form and in plain-language versions.

The development of the NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC was made possible in part through the financial resources of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These resources allowed NCMS to bring environmental compliance information to metal finishers, paint and coating facilities, the printed wiring board industry, and the public through the web-site, fact sheets, news updates, calendar of events, and other documents on the web-site. The NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC currently use the software “Cold Fusion”. It has a minimum amount of broad band demand to promote quick loading. It has been tested for use on Internet Explorer as well as Netscape.

VI. Project Proposal

All applicants must submit a proposal that identifies their ability to manage the NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC and to support the other EPA sponsored Centers. Project proposals must, at a minimum, include the following items: Executive Summary, Project Activities, the Center Management Plan, Clients Needs, and Available Technologies as outlined below. EPA will negotiate a detailed scope of work with the successful applicant. The successful applicant will be asked to submit a Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance following negotiation of the work plan. (See www.whitehouse.gov/OMB/grants/SF424.pdf) Please note that the final application will be subject to the Executive Order 12372 Intergovernmental Review Process. (See www.cfda.gov/public/EO12372.htm) Applicants must clearly mark information they consider Confidential Business Information (CBI). EPA will make final confidentiality decisions in accordance with Agency regulations at 40 CFR Part 2, Subpart B. The applicant should consider the following project proposal format:

Executive Summary: A summary of the planned project.

Project Activities: The proposal should include a description of the following planned activities including milestones. Describe the approach(es) to:

- Maintain and supplement content currently available on the NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC.
- Identify compliance assistance needs and close gaps in environmental compliance assistance materials and services currently provided.
- Maintain, develop, and enhance working relationship(s) with experts and national organizations related to metal finishing, paints and coatings and printed wiring board manufacturing.
- Conduct outreach to the metal finishing, paints and coatings and the printed wiring board industry and promote use of the centers.
- Explore and implement revenue generating activities to reduce the center's reliance on federal funding;
- Correct, as necessary, content on the web-site that needs to be updated.
- Market the Centers to their intended audiences through Internet marketing, design enhancements and other Internet integration techniques.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Centers. This evaluation is necessary to help the Centers determine whether they are continuing to meet their customers needs. Activities associated with this task may include:
 - < Assisting the Centers to survey their users through the posting of on-line surveys.
 - < Aggregation of survey responses across Centers to evaluate the Centers' program in general and identify opportunities for Centers' improvement.
 - < Identify usage trends, opportunities, and potential improvements using monthly activity information.
- Work with the ten Centers to continue to foster communication among the Centers' cooperative agreement recipients and a sharing of tools among the Centers.

Management Plan: A thorough discussion of how the grant will be managed, including:

- Internal Management Plan: Describe how the applicant will ensure the day to day success of the project. This description should include the proposed organizational structure, supervisory responsibilities, and a proposed staffing plan.
- External Management Plan: Project proposals must describe how the cooperative agreement recipient will solicit / maintain partners to support the compliance assistance centers. Illustrate organizational structure between the primary project partners and supporting entities. Please note that all contracts for the purchase of goods and services must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 40 CFR Part 30.
- Marketing and Outreach: A description of a marketing and outreach activity plan to promote the services provided.
- Financial Plan: A financial plan for the project that identifies all sources of funds. Although EPA does not require matching funds, the grant recipient is encouraged to provide information regarding resources (cash/in-kind services) that they would commit to manage center. The financial plan should break out planned expenditures by both activity (e.g., maintenance of the web site) and object class (e.g., personnel, travel).

Factors that EPA will evaluate in the financial plan include:

- ~ Ability to partner with other organizations to secure funding or in-kind services to reduce reliance on Federal funding.
- ~ Ability to maintain management control and track costs of the project and maintain required records on funding.)

Past Experience and Qualifications of Key Personnel: Project proposals must:

- Describe the applicant's experience in developing and maintaining web based environmental compliance assistance services, or similar projects, and its experience in working with compliance issues related to metal finishing, paints and coatings and printed wiring board manufacturing.
- Provide information on its experience in managing Federal financial assistance, including the results of audits or monitoring by the awarding agency.
- Include a description of the qualifications and experience of key personnel and their responsibilities. A detailed description of how the qualification and/or experience of each key personnel match with his/her responsibilities is important.

Clients Needs: Understanding the environmental needs of the metal finishing, paints and coatings and printed wiring board industry is critical to the continued success and sustainability of the compliance assistance centers. Project proposals should address the following areas. How will:

- the applicant ensure the web site continues to be useful to the targeted user group(s)?
- the experiences of the key personnel enhance the center's operation?
- the applicant identify the environmental compliance needs of the metal finishing, paints

and coatings and printed wiring board industry?

Center Technologies/Configuration: The ability to readily seamlessly adopt and maintain the existing center site and associated software is critical. Project proposals should address how:

- The recipient will ensure seamless operation of NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC capabilities.
- The recipient will assure that operation and technologies meet the needs of the users as identified by contact with industry representatives.

Collaboration with Other Compliance Assistance Providers: The proposal must explain how NMFRC, PCRC and PWBRC will interact and collaborate with other compliance assistance providers, government agencies, and organizations. Specifically, the proposal should address the following:

- How the applicant will collaborate with other compliance assistance providers to leverage limited resources.
- Methods that the applicant will use to promote the use of the compliance assistance centers among other compliance assistance providers.
- How the applicant will evaluate and demonstrate the success of the compliance assistance centers yearly, including output measurements and, if possible, measurements of risk reduction or compliance improvements for facilities that use the center.

VII. Pre-application Assistance

Eligible and interested applicants may contact Joseph Hall with questions. EPA will post answers to significant or frequently asked questions on a web-site at <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/assistance/centers/index.html>. Applicants are encouraged to review these questions and answers prior to submitting initial proposals. Please note, the Agency cannot provide guidance on proposal development or other advice that may provide a competitive advantage.

VIII. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

EPA will use the following criteria to rank applications. Each proposal will be given a high, medium or low rating for each criterion. Each criterion will receive equal weight when EPA reviewers determine the overall merit of the proposal. Based on the ratings, EPA reviewers will select up to two proposals for consideration by the Agency selecting official.

1. Comprehensiveness of proposed approach to service delivery.
2. Innovations that may enhance compliance assistance services available to the metal finishing, paints and coatings and printed wiring board industry.
3. Demonstrated understanding of environmental compliance challenges faced by the metal finishing, paints and coatings and printed wiring board industry.
4. Cost effectiveness and efficiency of proposed activities.
5. Qualifications and experience of key personnel in relation to their responsibilities.

6. Previous performance history on similar projects.
7. Soundness of approach to collaborating with other organizations.
8. Soundness of approach to outreach to all segments of the metal finishing, paints and coatings and printed wiring board industry sectors.
9. Soundness of proposed revenue generating activities that may reduce the center's reliance on Federal funding.
10. Soundness of proposed approach to facilitate cross-Center collaboration, networking and measurement activities.

Any disputes that arise during the selection process will be resolved in accordance with 40 CFR 330.63 and Part 31, subpart F. (See web-site at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>.) Please note that EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals or applications and make no awards.

IX. Proposal Submission

Interested applicants should submit three copies of the proposal to the following address to be postmarked by June 18, 2003.

Joseph Hall (2224A)
Office of Compliance, OECA
US Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Each proposal should not exceed 30 pages and it should include all of the information requested in this solicitation with a break down of budget for each category. A team of EPA personnel will evaluate the proposals based on the criteria set forth in Section VI and identify two applications for further consideration. An authorized Agency Approval Official in OECA will select the final applicant. An EPA award official will make the final award. EPA is expected to select the final cooperative agreement recipient by June 27, 2003. For questions, please contact Joseph Hall by phone at (202) 564-2271, fax at (202) 564-7083 or e-mail at hall.joseph@epa.gov.